

VII

“You shall not commit adultery.”

Exodus 20:14

A HIGHER EXPECTATION

A popular belief in Christendom is that the commandments given to Moses are now hopelessly antiquated, and have been replaced by the grace of Jesus. Well, yes, that is true—to a point.

There is a recurring pattern in God’s word: Many precepts that are specific and tightly focused in the Old Testament are more general and broadly focused in the New. Instead of nullifying the old, this has the effect of actually widening its scope.



Take, for example, the comparison of the Old and New Testaments regarding adultery. The twentieth chapter of Leviticus goes into graphic detail about the circumstances by which an adulterous (or otherwise sexually immoral) man or woman would be punished—principally by death.

“If *there is* a man who commits adultery with another man’s wife, one who commits adultery with his friend’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. If *there is* a man who lies with his father’s wife, he has uncovered his father’s nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death, their bloodguiltiness is upon them...”

Leviticus 20:10-11ff

In its specificity, however, the Law leaves open the supposed possibility that an infraction that avoids any of those itemized circumstances might be perfectly all right. But here is what the Lord Jesus had to say about adultery in the New Testament:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Matthew 5:27-28

The immediate *penalty* for adultery may have been removed for believers by God’s grace in Christ, but under that grace the *definition* of adultery was actually expanded. The Mosaic law had nothing to say about one’s fantasies, the thoughts one entertained about a person not his wife or her husband, the purity of the heart. The Ten Commandments emphasized behavior, actions. But Jesus in His teachings

invariably emphasized the condition of the heart first, for out of the heart springs our words and our actions.

And He was saying, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting *and* wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”

Mark 7:20-23



The goal of every follower of Christ is to become more like Him. No sane person can believe that in this temporal life in the flesh we will ever *attain* that goal, but we are called to grow in holiness as we use Christ’s life as a template for our own.

Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

1 Peter 1:13-16

What began under the Law as *Don’t have sex with anyone to whom you are not married*, is now, under grace in Christ, *Purify your thought-life so it doesn’t even occur to you to consider doing such a thing*.

And while the penalty for failure is now less lethal, the bar of obedience has been raised considerably higher.